

White Sea Ice Diving

The White Sea is one of the most beautiful among the seas of northern Russia. The nature here is untouched by man, and the local animal life is rich and unique. Being part of Russia's inland sea it belongs to the Arctic Ocean basin. Every winter Greenland seals make their rookeries in the northern part of the White Sea and their calves are born there. In summer birds team-up on uninhabited islands to hatch eggs and rear their chicks. The sea is also home to the White whales.

The deserted seashores and numerous uninhabited islands provide scenic panoramas. Steep rocky shores are alternated with flat strips of taiga and mixed forest.

Underwater Life

The underwater world of the White Sea boasts excellent scenery and magnificent sea life. You will see soft corals, sponges, starfish, crabs, hermit crabs, sea urchins, shrimps and sea anemones. Underwater rocks provide dwelling places for cod, wolffish, sea perch, butterfish and flounders. In winter lancet fish, tomcod flounder and pinogor will allow you to approach very closely.

The temperature of the water in winter is -0.5°C /23F at the surface and goes down to -3°C /26F at depth. Salinity of the White Sea is 27.5–28 parts per thousand, lower than the mean salinity of the Arctic Ocean. Tides are regular and semi-diurnal. Tide speed varies from 0.1–4m/sec. Water visibility ranges from 15–50m.

Climate

The climate of the White Sea is very changeable and unpredictable. The White Sea winter is long and severe. The mean temperature in February is -15°C /5F and may fall as low as -26°C /-15F, and even -40°C when the Arctic air masses take possession of the sea. The ice may be up to 1.5m thick. At times, warm air from the Atlantic raises the air temperature to $+6^{\circ}\text{C}$ / 42F.

Places of interest

The Solovetski Archipelago treasures a monastery founded in XV century – a holy place for many Russian Orthodox followers. In the 1930s, the ancient Monastery was turned into the first Gulag concentration camp where thousands of people were martyred. The Archipelago was inhabited in the Stone Age, and many Neolithic monuments, labyrinths and dolmens can be seen here.

How to get to the Arctic Circle Lodge ?

You have to book a connecting flight into and out of Moscow, St. Petersburg or Kuusamo via Helsinki, depending on the way you choose. Please contact us or your travel agent for international flight reservations, and inform us of your arrival date, time and flight number so that we can book hotel and airport transfers for you

If you prefer to stay longer in Moscow, St. Petersburg or Kuusamo we will be glad to book accommodation and arrange a special programme for you. This could include, for example, city sightseeing, theatre visits, etc.

Where to fly to ?

Option 1

By train from Moscow

Our representative will meet you in Moscow International Airport and provide you with all necessary documents and tickets. The airport transfer and hotel accommodation can be arranged and have to be prebooked

An exciting part of the programme is a 27-hours 36 min railway journey in a comfortable wagon-lit from Moscow to the Arctic station Chupa. During the 1,673-kilometer trip you will watch the nature of Middle Russia gradually give place to the Russian North. The train departs from Moscow Leningradskiy railways station every day at 00:30AM, and arrives to Chupa at 4:30 AM next day. Then you will have a two-hour transfer by car from Chupa station to the AC Dive Centre, arriving around 7:00 AM.

Recommended trains:

MOSCOW OCT – CHUPA 016A - Departure at 00:30 , Arrival at 4:06 27 hours 36 min journey

CHUPA - MOSCOW OCT 015A - Departure at 03:00 a.m Arrival 06:54 a.m. on the next day. Russian Railways offers sleeping cars with 1st class (2 berth) and 2nd class (4 berth) compartments.

Prices:

1st class 2 berth compartment from € 415

2nd class 4 berth compartment from € 244

Option 2

By plane from Moscow

If you prefer to fly - you will have to take a flight from Moscow airport Sheremetyevo, terminal-1, at 19:50 PM. Arriving to Murmansk – 22:00 PM. Upon your arrival our representative will meet you and you will have a 5-hours car transfer by car from Murmansk airport to the Arctic Circle Dive Centre, arriving around 4:00 AM.

Recommended flights:

Aeroflot Flight 617 Moscow – Murmansk Departure at 19:50 p.m. Arrival at 22:00 p.m. 2 hours 10 min journey

Aeroflot Flight 618 Murmansk — Moscow Departure at 08:00 a.m Arrival at 10:35

Prices from € 385

Option 3

By train from St. Petersburg

Our representative will meet you in St. Petersburg International Airport and provide you with all necessary documents and tickets. The airport transfer and hotel accommodation can be arranged and have to be prebooked.

The night train St-Petersburg–Murmansk departs daily from Oktiabrskaya Railway Station at 8:59 am and arrives to Chupa station at 4:06 am the following day. (Total travel time: 21.5 hrs.) A two-hour car transfer will deliver you to the Arctic Circle Dive Centre. A train journey to the diving site is an adventure in itself

Recommended

trains:

ST PETERSBURG OCT – CHUPA 016A - Departure at 08:59 , Arrival at 4:06 21 hours journey

CHUPA - ST PETERSBURG OCT 015A - Departure at 03:00 a.m Arrival 22:29 p.m.

Russian Railways offers sleeping cars with 1st class (2 berth) and 2nd class (4 berth) compartments.

Prices:

1st class 2 berth compartment from € 395

2nd class 4 berth compartment from € 224

Option 4

By car transfer from Finland

You have to book your international connecting flights to Kuusamo via Helsinki and inform us of your arrival date, time and flight number.

Our representative will meet you at the Kuusamo airport upon your arrival and you will have a 7 hours transfer to the Arctic Circle Lodge through the Finish – Russian border Sala.

Prices from € 214.

Entry Visa

Russian Visa Info

Please be advised that it is your responsibility to have a valid passport and Russian entry visa. On your request, Waterproof Expeditions will provide you with a Russian entry voucher after your booking.

Russian visa application requirements:

- (a) Completed application form;
- (b) 3 recent identical passport-size photos with applicant's name written clearly on the reverse;
- (c) Valid passport;
- (d) A voucher issued by an authorized travel company stating the reference number, passenger names, dates of entry and exit, itinerary and means of transportation (provided by Arctic Circle);
- (e) Return air ticket (copy acceptable);
- (f) Fee (payable in cash or by postal order);
- (g) Postal applications must be accompanied by a large, stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Cost for a Russian invitation for visa application is € 30.

Please check the websites of the Embassies of the Russian Federation in your country or the Russian Consulate. To locate a Consular office that serves your region and to obtain further information, please contact the Russian Consulate directly or visit or www.russianembassy.net or www.russianconsulate.com

For British Citizens.

For information regarding UK passports go to the United Kingdom Passport Service website: www.ukpa.gov.uk.

Diving Baggage

All scuba equipment must be carried within the weight allowance of the airline. The free baggage allowance is 30 kg in business class and 20 kg in economy class in the Aeroflot airlines. In addition to the above free baggage allowance, each passenger may carry in the aircraft cabin a baggage of 5 kg of the following articles free of charge: a lady's bag/man's case or a paper folder, overcoat, blanket, umbrella or walking stick, photographic camera, a portable PC, reasonable amount of reading material for the flight, infant's carrying basket and fully collapsible invalid's wheelchair and/or any medical aid on which the passenger is dependent. Carriage of excess baggage is on payment of appropriate fee around € 4 per kilo.

Ice Diving Programme

We offer in co-operation with the Arctic Circle Dive Centre an ice diving programme every year from February to April

Diving is performed with safety ropes according to PADI standards using experienced instructors and dive guides, and includes 2 dives per day and diver transport to diving sites by snowmobile.

A mobile diving camp is set up on diving sites. Wooden cabins on sledges provide shelter for changing, for drying of equipment and include a common room module for lunch and socializing. A heated wooden shelter is placed just over the ice-hole (maina) for those who prefer a heated space between dives

Instruction in basic Arctic survival will be a part of the programme in order to show divers how to read the ice and establish a safe diving environment, including how to deal with frostbite and the potential hazards of Hypothermia.



Diving Requirements

All dives are carried out in-line with the International Federation PADI standards These standards consist of:

Diving in a buddy system which is part of the safety technique of the recreational diving. Stay close to your buddy throughout the dive, pay extra attention to this when one or both of you are photographing or filming.

Follow the diving rules, which the representative of the Dive Centre has laid out during the briefings.

No diving under the influence of drugs and alcoholic or the remains of drugs or alcohol intoxication.

The diver should realize that in case of rules violation or non-fulfillment of safety technique standards, the representative of the Dive Centre can refrain the diver from the dive or the whole program of diving.

For recommendations on your dive equipment please check out the information on [Dive Equipment](#) in the section Travel Resources.

Requirements for the ice diving programme participants

Diving program participants must hold an Ice Diver Certificate from one of the international underwater federation or have made 5 registered under-ice dives.

It will be necessary to demonstrate the following abilities to the instructors in the course of the check dive;

Cleaning the mask out of water;

Changing the main regulator to the reserve one and vice versa;

Tapping into the buddy reserve regulator. Conducting an emergency rising to the surface breathing by means of the buddy reserve regulator;

Using the safety rope;

Buoyancy control

Communicating with the buddy and with the tender;

Overturning upside down under ice and getting back to the standard position.

Divers without the necessary experience can undertake an Padi Ice Diver Course at the Arctic Circle Dive Centre.

Diving and snorkelling with Beluga's



All year round it is possible to observe, dive and snorkel with Beluga Whales. Two male Beluga whales have been introduced to a natural habitat (a special enclosure divided from the open sea by a net), not far from the Dive Centre, as part of a joint project between the Arctic Circle Dive Centre and the Utrish Dolphinarium, owned by the A. N. Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution, part of the Russian Academy of Sciences. One of these white whales performed in Sharm El Sheikh and Saudi Arabia before. The plan for the future is to bring female Beluga whales and to expand the territory where beluga whales will thrive.

To dive with Beluga whales a supplement of 145 Euro will be charged.
If you prefer to snorkel the costs are 66 Euro.

Dive sites at the Arctic Circle Lodge

Cape Kindo site

There are a wide variety of underwater rocky landscapes within the vicinity of the Arctic Circle Dive Center. Straits with rapid currents for drift diving and wrecks, offer additional experiences.

At the Cape Kindo site, the water depth increases very gradually. A gentle slope reaching 50–70m with a very well outlined belt of Laminaria and other kelps represents the relief. Hermit crabs, crabs and starfish populate the seabed, including the cold-water species Urasterias and Pteraster. This is the place to meet the big predatory gastropods of the White Sea such as Neptunea and Bukcinum.

Krestovi Islands

In the vicinity of Krestovi Islands, there is a rock overgrown with sea anemones (*Actinia metridium*) and a bank with very beautiful soft corals, more sea anemones (*Actinia* sp) and sponges. Here one can come across hermit crabs, starfish (*Urasteria* sp) and a rare brittle star (*Ophiuroidea gorgonacephalus*) with the exotic name of the 'Head of Gorgon'.

The top of the bank is 14–18m below sea level. The steep northern slope of the bank extends to a depth of more than 50m. A gentler southern slope reaches 28–30m and the bank diameter is about 15–20m. Here you will also find a shipwreck, a fishing vessel with body length of 12m, overgrown with Ascidiacea sp and sea anemones (*Actinia* sp).

Guba Nilmo

At the entrance to Guba Nilmo, near Isle Ploshkin, the sunken ship Yaroslavets lies at a depth of 22m. The ship has a body length of 22m.

Isle Kastyan

During dives at Isle Kastyan you will see a virtually vertical wall perfectly lighted by the midday sun. You will see bright *Actinia* sp and *Ascidiacea* sp, gastropods and *Nudibranchiata* molluscs

moving unhurriedly on the rock shelves. Your attention will also be drawn to starfish on the seabed as well as to middle-sized lancet fish hiding in the rock crevices.

Strait of Velikaya Salma

Drift diving is performed in the Strait of Velikaya Salma near to islands of Kandalaksha National Park. The speed of tidal current here reaches 2m/sec. You will float over forests of Laminaria, purple-fish, and colorful sponges, as well as meadows of shell rock overgrown with Ascidiacea sp and hydroids.

At Biofiltry Bay diving is organized near to vertical rocks overlooking picturesque stone blocks covering the seabed. Local dwellers are starfish and Ascidiacea sp, and one can come across Nudibranchiata molluscs, gastropods and bivalve molluscs. The name, 'the bio-filter bay', comes from the numerous water filtering aquatic animals that inhabit this area. The bay is free from sea currents.

Training Sites

Training dives are performed in the neighborhood of the dive center pier. This is the ideal place to practice dry-suit-diving techniques and underwater swimming. The bed of the sea is flat here and 7–10m deep. There is no sea current. Despite the very smooth and plain relief of the seabed, there is a host of things to look at, including soles, big hermit-crabs, Nudibranchiata molluscs, starfish, eel-like Pholidae sp, tittlebat and bullheads.

Dive sites White Sea Anemony Rock

Anemony Rock is a hallowed place for White Sea divers.

It is a rocky outcrop that rises up from the slope of Bolshoy Krestovy [Big Cross] Island, as big as a three-story building and shaped like a dragon's tooth. Underwater, the island is surrounded by a sandy plateau, which gives way at a depth of 6-7 m to a reasonably steep slope, from which the rock arises. On the coastal side, its base lies at a depth of 13-15 m, while on the seaward side its base goes down to 19-21 m. Several groups of boulders lie at a depth of 23-25 m (by the base). The top of the rock lies 6-9 m deep. The bottom here is very silty, so if you tend to move your arms and flippers about underwater be especially careful to avoid sudden, sharp movements on the Rock, otherwise you will raise a tremendous cloud of mud. The Rock's central, highest part is surrounded by boulders of various shapes and sizes, inhabited by different numbers of sea creatures.

The White Sea is a sea of strong tides. There are two high tides and two low tides a day, producing strong currents in either direction in places. There are no insurmountable currents on the Rock, but it is still better to bear them in mind when planning a dive. Another factor is the water temperature. In summer the water is separated into two layers by a shifting thermocline. Above it, the water temperature can reach 12-17°C, but below it the water temperature does not exceed 8°C. In winter, the temperature under the ice is 1 to -1.5 °C. Diving conditions here are not the most difficult, but factors listed above (the depth, the steep rock face, the silty bottom, the temperature and the current) mean it is best for divers at the Rock to be confident with buoyancy control.

Velikaya Salma Strait, Kandalaksha Bay, in the White Sea, is one of the few well-studied underwater sites in the area. This is the location of Moscow State University's White Sea Biological Station. The latter's staff and students have been doing scientific marine research here for 67 years. It is known for certain that the Rock was rediscovered in 1986, but no one can remember when it was found for the first time.

When you go diving at the Rock the thing that strikes you is the soft multicoloured carpet of anemones. You get this impression because the metridium anemones (*Metridium senile*) here have very fine catch tentacles. Metridia are large anemones up to 30 cm in height, but you only have to touch their soft tentacles and they will shrink into a tight, muscular stump. All animals in cold water act slowly, so a metridium that has closed up will take a while to reopen. These anemones feed on plankton and any suspended organic matter. If you dive here at a time when a lot of lion's mane jellyfish are swimming in the water, you'll be able to see anemones catch them by their long tendrils. Metridia are not fussy about temperature, so they can be found

from a depth of half a metre on any more or less firm substrate, from laminaria (sea cabbage) leaves to sunken wrecks. On the rock the anemones grow so thickly that they resemble a flowerbed or a soft carpet, providing photographers and filmmakers with an inexhaustible source of material. Apart from the magnificent metridia garden, there are other fascinating creatures here as well, such as fish. You can see cod and wolffish hiding amongst the rocks, as well sea perch and Arctic sculpin. Shrimps and spider crabs, sea slugs and hermit crabs 'graze' on the red-algae-covered rock faces and between the anemones. Such diversity of life has been, and continues to be, of interest to marine biologists doing research on the Rock, and brings tourists back again and again to dive at this remarkable site. The location is so unique that it is protected by PADI as a natural heritage site.

Dive Site Biofiltry Bay

Biofiltry Bay is a small bay that cuts deeply into the coastline. It is sheltered on one side by sheer cliffs. Underwater, a vertical wall juts out up to 7-8 m, after which the slope becomes flatter and ends in a fairly silty bottom at a depth of 12-15 m. Brown seaweed –fucus and laminaria– grow from the shoreline to a depth of 6-7 m. Biofiltry Bay is nothing extraordinary in summer, but it completely changes in winter. The most interesting thing about ice diving here is the ice itself. Thanks to the White Sea's strong tidal currents, the high and low water levels differ by up to 2 m, and the tidal cycle lasts 12 hours. In other words, the water level rises over roughly 6 hours and then falls over roughly the same time. The ice rises and falls with the water, freezing to rock faces with which it comes into contact, breaking off, and freezing to them again. Consequently, the ice formations underwater around the vertical wall can be up to 4-5 m thick! Despite this, however, the icebergs are well lit by the sunlight that penetrates unhindered through the cracks between the ice spikes. The water temperature in summer reaches 20-22°C above the thermocline and 9-10°C below it. In winter the water cools to -1.8°C and stays at more or less that temperature throughout the ice-diving season. Visibility underwater in Biofiltry Bay often varies, and depends not only on the season but also on the depth, and rarely exceeds 20 m horizontally.

Biofiltry Bay is located in Velikaya Salma Strait, Kandalaksha Bay, in the White Sea. It owes its name to the nearby Moscow State University Biological Station, in particular to Kirill Voskresensky, a lecturer in the Department of Invertebrate Zoology, who gave the site its curious and original monicker. There is, indeed, some truth to the name. Biological filters are animal filters that remove particles of food from the water. They include bivalve mollusks, such as mussels, and barnacles, which are widespread in the White Sea. All the cliffs and rocks in the littoral zone (as the part of the coast that is submerged by water during high tide is called) in Biofiltry Bay are totally covered with barnacles and mussels, and this is evidently what inspired Voskresensky to give it its name.

If you go diving here at a warm time of year, you'll find it interesting to see the fucus seaweeds that grow vertically in deep water. These plants with air bladders grow only in shallow Arctic waters. In summer a vast number of moon jellyfish (*Aurelia aurita*) drift here –a remarkable sight. They cover the whole bay down to a depth of several metres. As for the biological filters after which the bay is named, there are not so many of them –only small mollusks, which grow in a narrow band in shallow water, and barnacles, which grow on the rocks. In winter, hermit crabs, starfish and shrimps dwell amongst the laminaria below the ice wall and formations, while cod and wolffish hide in the crevices. It is only in winter that small sandhoppers ascend from the deep to the inner, underwater surface of the ice. They live in cavities in the ice itself, thus hiding from fish. In March the breeding season starts from some crustaceans. If you look carefully, you may see shrimps and seed shrimps *Ostracod* incubating their young in brood chambers on the underside of their pleons (abdomens). Besides the animals, it's also interesting to look at the brittle hollow ice stalactites that form on the inner surface of the ice ceiling from fresh water. These 'chandeliers' can be 20 cm long and roughly 10-15 cm in diameter.

Dive site Klumba (The Flowerbed)

Klumba is an underwater rocky outcrop. It consists of different-sized rocks, which look as if they have been deliberately piled up on the flat silty bed. Were all the water in Velkaya Salma Strait drained away from it, one would see that Klumba is part of one of the ridges that run right along its bottom. Therefore, if you know where to look you can see different variations of this dive site. Geophysicists from Moscow State University helped us find Klumba. Students

from the Department of Geophysics are already in their second year of practical work at the 'Arctic Circle' base, where they are learning to work with different underwater locators. At the same time, they are also showing the divers new sites.

The highest part of Klumba –the tops of its largest boulders– lies at a depth of 11-13 m (depending on the tidal phase), and its deepest point –the flat bed– at a depth of around 17 m. The pile of rocks has a radius of 10-15 m and resembles an Alpine mountain or a flowerbed owing to the anemones that grow thickly there. Thanks to its small size, Klumba can be viewed as a whole, so you can enjoy either an overall view or a detailed study of it.

Diving at Klumba is possible at almost any time of year, at any time of day. In summer the site is accessible by a launch, which brings divers there from the 'Arctic Circle' landing in a couple of minutes, while in winter divers can reach it by snowmobile and, after sawing just one maina (an advantage much appreciated by ice divers!), can enjoy the garden of rocks and anemones. Klumba is good to visit by day and fascinating by night. Indeed, it is probably hard to find a better place, given the site's proximity, depth and fauna.

The water temperature in summer reaches 15-18°C above the thermocline, and 9-10°C below it. The thermocline is usually at a depth of 10-12 m. In winter the water cools to -1.8°C and stays at more or less that temperature throughout the ice-diving season. Visibility at Klumba does not vary greatly with the time of year, as the water is clean and clear under the thermocline. In summer it is around 15-20 m, in winter over 30 m.

Velikaya Salma Strait, Kandalaksha Bay, in the White Sea. As always, the coastline is very jagged, with little islets and picturesque bays. The sea here is so calm that it is like a lake, with no strong winds or waves anywhere. But as soon as one goes underwater the elements make themselves known: there are many places with strong tidal currents in Kandalaksha Bay. These 'underwater winds' 'blow' with enviable regularity –for six hours in one direction, then for six hours in the other. Thanks to this movement of water life on the bottom blossoms in all its splendour. Some of the most interesting dive sites are concentrated here, although it is not that easy to reach them; Velikaya Salma Strait is, putting it mildly, a long way from built-up areas. It is, however, close to the Arctic Circle Dive Centre, from where Salma's underwater attractions are just a stone's throw away, with Klumba even closer.

Klumba is a convenient site for sessile marine organisms. A thick colony of metridia live on the rocks. Metridia are large anemones, up to 20 cm high, with soft tentacles. Their colour ranges from white to bright orange, but rocks can be covered only with white ones, or only with orange ones. But it is more interesting when a mixture grow together, making up a real bouquet. Metridia feed on any organic matter brought by the current –both plankton and detritus (material once living, now dead). They are usually open, with their tentacles and mouth visible, but they can close up, retracting their 'heads' and turning into slippery stumps. This happens when they are frightened by something, such a diver's flippers or arms. Sometimes all the anemones close up, as if under mass depression, but this is a seasonal phenomenon, lasting from December to mid-February.

Dive site the Coral Grotto: Life on the Ceiling

The Coral Grotto is a niche in the rock slope of Kishkin Island, about ten square metres in area. It has no floor; the back wall has a sheer drop right to the sea bed. Kishkin is a high, circular island with a precipitous coast, with a negative slope in places, on the surface and underwater. A plateau lightly covered with seaweed juts out to a depth of around 3 metres. One can only wonder how the seaweed clings on to the monolithic rock. When you reach the edge of the plateau you find it drops away abruptly into a black abyss and you want to hold onto something. It is no use shining your torch downwards; the light will not penetrate further than 45 metres. Following the rock, you start descending, and very quickly find yourself in total darkness. At a depth of 22-24 m the grotto opens up before you. If you get this far down and don't find the niche in the rock, you've missed it, and you need to look to the left or right for it. The main thing in this situation is to keep an eye on your depth and your no-decompression limit, and to be aware of how your senses are performing. In cold, dark water nitrogen narcosis can often take hold even if the water is not that deep, and the form it takes can be unpleasant. You will be spending the entire dive hovering over a black abyss, with nothing to help get your bearings.

For diving in the coral grotto to be comfortable it is best to have a powerful torch with a wide beam. Remember this when you go diving there!

The White Sea is a sea of strong tides. There are two high tides and two low tides a day, producing strong currents in either direction in places. There are no insurmountable currents around the grotto cliff, but it is still better to bear them in mind when planning a dive. Another factor is the water temperature. In summer the water is separated into two layers by a shifting thermocline. Above it, the water temperature can reach 12-17°C, but below it the water temperature does not exceed 8°C. The thermocline by Kishkin Island is usually at a depth of 12-15 m.

The factors listed above mean diving conditions at the coral grotto can be categorised as difficult. On the other hand, the site is genuinely beautiful, and divers who feel confident underwater will really enjoy it.

Kishkin Island, Chupa Bay, in the White Sea's Kandalaksha Bay. Kishkin Island and other small and large islands form an archipelago. There are many interesting dive sites in this region. In addition, Chupa Bay has been comparatively well studied thanks to divers from two biological stations, one belonging to Saint Petersburg State University, the other to the Russian Academy of Sciences, and to a great extent to the regular voyages of the diving expedition vessel the Kartesh in the region. Even so, the grotto itself and its inhabitants remain largely a mystery. Thanks to its considerable remoteness from any place of human habitation, divers rarely find their way to it. Those scientists who have dived here, though, have come across many biological mysteries. Diving in the grotto is forbidden in windy weather and when the sea is choppy. In addition, one needs to know exactly where the grotto is.

The colonies of soft Alcyonaria coral are why people dive in the grotto. One representative of this group lives in the White Sea – *Gersemia* (*Gersemia fruticosa*). Alcyonaria look like miniature trees and grow up to a meter high, ranging from snow white to brilliant orange in color. They have an endoskeleton, formed by individual calcareous needles called spicules (or sclerites). They support the colonies, which, by contrast, remain soft and flexible. The colonies consist of numerous identical polyps, which are connected to one another by fleshy tissue. These corals like cold water, so in the White Sea they live at depths of over 20-30 meters. On mud banks or rock ledges where the current is light, they form genuine thickets. When your torch picks out one of these translucent, ghostly miniature trees from the gloom, your heart will skip a beat. Against the cold and murky background, it is a fantastic sight! Various invertebrates, such as shrimps, often 'graze' on the soft coral. They pick up what has settled on the branchlets, thus feeding themselves and cleaning the coral. The Alcyonaria themselves 'fish out' any organic matter, both living and dead, from the water.

In the grotto the corals grow on the ceiling, quite thickly. The Alcyonaria extend up to a metre, but are afraid of diving bubbles and being touched. Therefore, it is best not to actually enter the grotto, but to view the sight from outside. The niche in the rock is not deep, so even an average torch is enough for seeing the whole colony.

Besides the coral, various individual anemones grow in the grotto. Large red and transparent shrimps and many small sandhoppers and hermit, spider and lyre crabs dwell amongst the corals.

It is possible to make a safety stop on the plateau and have a look at the laminaria and the creatures that live amongst it: Arctic sculpin, cod, crabs and hermit crabs.

Dates and Prices

01 Feb 2009 06 Feb 2009	White Sea Ice Diving » Arctic Circle Diving Lodge	Comfort double room Economy double room	1338 EUR 1032 EUR
			» Rates include/exclude
08 Feb 2009 13 Feb 2009	White Sea Ice Diving » Arctic Circle Diving Lodge	Comfort double room Economy double room	1338 EUR 1032 EUR
15 Feb 2009 20 Feb 2009	White Sea Ice Diving » Arctic Circle Diving Lodge	Comfort double room Economy double room	1338 EUR 1032 EUR
22 Feb 2009 27 Feb 2008	White Sea Ice Diving » Arctic Circle Diving Lodge	Comfort double room Economy double room	1338 EUR 1032 EUR
01 Mar 2009 06 Mar 2009	White Sea Ice Diving » Arctic Circle Diving Lodge	Comfort double room Economy double room	1452 EUR 1032 EUR
07 Mar 2009 12 Mar 2009	White Sea Ice Diving » Arctic Circle Diving Lodge	Comfort double room Economy double room	1452 EUR 1032 EUR
16 Mar 2009 20 Mar 2009	White Sea Ice Diving » Arctic Circle Diving Lodge	Comfort double room Economy double room	1452 EUR 1032 EUR
31 Mar 2009 04 Apr 2009	White Sea Ice Diving » Arctic Circle Diving Lodge	Comfort double room Economy double room	1134 EUR 860 EUR
05 Apr 2009 10 Apr 2009	White Sea Ice Diving » Arctic Circle Diving Lodge	Comfort double room Economy double room	1338 EUR 1032 EUR
12 Apr 2009 17 Apr 2009	White Sea Ice Diving » Arctic Circle Diving Lodge	Comfort double room Economy double room	1338 EUR 1032 EU

Detailed Itinerary

Day 1

Arrival at the Arctic Circle Lodge

Arrival at the Arctic Circle Lodge

First we will do a check dive and in the afternoon we dive a slope near Maly Krestovy (Small Cross) Island. Kelp forests, crabs and starfish. In the evening we have our first experience with a Russian banya and rest.

Day 2 -Day 5

Ice Diving Programme



Ice diving programme – 2 dives per day for qualified ice divers. We will be diving at a legendary cliff with sea anemones near the Krestovy (Cross) Islands, diving by a bank with soft corals and wreck diving on a wooden fishing boat and steel scientific boat.

There will be a lecture programme on White Sea biology and conservation programmes. Other activities include snowmobile rides with the mobile ice camp, snorkelling with belugas, seabirds and seals watching, ice-fishing and Russian steam bath experience.



Day 6

Following the completion of the programme, at 23:30: departure from the Dive Centre for Chupa train station, Murmansk or Kuusamo Airport. Return to Moscow (the train arrives in Moscow on the following day). The programme can be changed depending to the ice and weather condition.

Alternatively the opportunity to take the ice diving specialty course conducted over the first 2 days of the programme.

Arctic Circle Diving Lodge

The Arctic Circle PADI dive centre is the only place in Europe and one of the best places in the world to discover sea ice diving. The White Sea: the only sea in Europe that freezes every year. Clear water, natural beauty of the Russian north, the wonderful underwater world, a well-found base and experienced instructors, make the Arctic Circle the world's ice diving capital.



Accommodation

Accommodation in comfortable wooden cabins on the shore of the frozen sea, exquisite Russian food, traditional Russian beverages and the Russian banya (steam bath) experience.

The wooden guesthouses offer accommodation in two types of room:

Comfort: Twin room with toilet, basin and shower

Economy: Twin room with common biotoilet, and shared basin (per two rooms).

Triple accommodation (with an extra bed) is possible on request

.No single supplement if prepared to share.

A common room is located in one of guest-houses. Daily meals are served here and it offers facilities for rest and relaxation: music center, karaoke, VCR, and a collection of English language videos and records.



Dining Room



Double Bedroom



Lounge

What do we see and what can we do ?

Fantastic underwater ice formations, caverns and fissures. Life underwater: soft corals, sea anemone beds, Gorgon's head brittle stars, hermit crabs, numerous starfish, and seaweed forests. Underwater cliffs and their inhabitants, an ice-diving safari, snorkelling with belugas and the wonderful Russian winter! Snowmobile rides to dives at the mobile ice camp. And of course great hiking opportunities around the lodge.

Check-in and check-out hours

The check-in time - 6 a.m

The check-out time - 23 p.m

The check- in and check-out time can be changed according to your transport schedule upon your advanced request and there is no extra payment for early check- in or late check- out.

Meals

Accommodation packages include full board (Russian and international cuisine): buffet breakfast, three-course lunch or packed lunch on diving site, and dinner (set menu). Cold snacks, tea, coffee and soft drinks are available around the clock

Should you need a vegetarian menu or have other special dietary requirements please inform us at time of booking.

Banya

The Russian steam bath (banya) is available daily. A visit to a traditional Russian steam bath provides a unique opportunity to get rid of anxiety and nervousness. It brings you peace of mind and serenity, cleans your skin and makes you feel more youthful. Herbal teas and liqueurs are offered during your banya session.



Medical aid

The center team includes a medical attendant with vast experience of military rescue teams and expeditions. Oxygen and a comprehensive first aid kit are also available.

Electricity outlets

The electricity outlets are European sockets 220 V with two round plugs. UK socket adapters are available.

Communication

A satellite phone is available for use. Rates on request.